

## THE WINDOW

### THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE—TODAY

*In the Great War one year and seven months passed between America's declaration of war and the Armistice. But almost two years have passed since Pearl Harbor, and as yet there is no end in sight. How is the morale of the American nation bearing up? Her human losses, with which we have dealt in another section of this issue, have not yet been great enough to affect it. But war also demands material sacrifices. The amount of these sacrifices is less important for the morale than the spirit in which they are borne. One man may cheerfully work for victory on no more than a minimum of existence, while another man's morale may be seriously affected when he has to forego meat once a week. It all depends on the outlook.*

*Although we do not know much about America today, we do know that there is no other nation where material values have been more highly extolled. Hence Americans are bound to be harder hit by material sacrifices imposed by the war than people who are more determined by spiritual considerations. In fact, we believe that the fate of the American standard of living, or "way of life," has a powerful influence on the war. The time may come when the palpable loss of their standard of living due to the war will loom larger in the American mind than the vague gains promised by victory.—K.M.*

**A**MERICA is a rich country and proud of this fact. Yet its wealth is unequally distributed, and since the founding of the Republic the gulf between rich and poor has widened immeasurably. While J. P. Morgan and his banker friends were sitting on the sunny side of life, share-cropper Johnny Brown was eking out a miserable existence of slow starvation by back-breaking labor. To Clark Gable and Joan Crawford, riding along the highways in swanky automobiles, life looked brighter than to the farmer and his family trekking in a rattletrap Ford from the Midwestern dust bowl in search of land not devastated by drought and sandstorms, or to the hill-billy in his Tennessee mountains who could neither read nor write and had to bear all the hardships of a primitive life.

Yet, on the whole, while the number of underprivileged Americans ran into many millions, the majority of US citizens, compared to people in a corresponding position elsewhere in the world, were well off. For theirs was a continent with tremendous natural resources, with no political or economic boundaries to impede the development of an increasing agricultural and industrial production. While the vast oceans on both sides of the USA became the most effective barriers to any potential enemy, her own aggressive imperialism pushed beyond these oceans to add the riches of

other continents to her own. Taxes were low or nonexistent. There was no compulsory military service. The government hardly ever interfered with the activities of the individual.

#### SEEKING FOR PROSPERITY

Franklin D. Roosevelt's first election in 1932 and his New Deal marked the turning point in the traditional American way of life. In order to recapture "prosperity" with its attending material benefits after years of economic depression, the new President had Congress enact a multiplicity of measures which whittled away much of what had been regarded as part and parcel of American life. Individualism had to give way to collectivism. The Administration began to interfere directly in economics. The Federal Government and the states initiated public relief works of gigantic proportions which were financed with the taxpayers' money and abused for political ends. Tendencies toward a planned economy were coupled with experiments in social reform. Military draft laws were introduced. One by one typical American conceptions disappeared.

Many Americans have been maintaining for the past ten years that more harm than good was done by the President's measures. Many of these latter were ambiguous in aim, lacked co-ordination, and were carried out

for show rather than with a clear plan. It is true that some signs of recovery were felt in the end at the price of a vastly multiplied public debt. Even so, US statistics shortly before that fateful day of December 8, 1941, revealed the number of those excluded from the American standard of living still to be no less than 45 million.

Nevertheless, most Americans were still materially well off. It needed the war into which the President plunged his country to destroy what was left of the American way of life.

#### "LESS MEAT AND MORE PATRIOTISM"

It seems amazing that foodstuffs should run short in a country which used to produce large agricultural surpluses. Yet this is what happened. At first, of course, only such commodities as sugar or coffee were affected, in which the USA has always been dependent on imports. (Sugar rationing was introduced in May 1942.) In October 1942 it became obvious that meat supplies were insufficient. New Yorkers were asked to adjust themselves to a weekly meat ration, and restaurants in the metropolis introduced meatless Tuesdays. In December the Secretary of Agriculture, Claude Wickard, announced that bottled, canned, frozen, and dried fruit and vegetables belong into the category of goods of which there is a shortage; compared to an average of 46 pounds a year for each person in prewar years, only 33 pounds would be available in 1943.

Early this year all the large cities began to suffer from acute shortages in many foodstuffs. Numerous packing plants, butcher shops, and restaurants had to close down for lack of supplies. Mrs. Roosevelt told the press that White House lunches and dinners would be served without butter. Next we read of a shortage of potatoes. Then came the "victory sausages," which were made hardly more palatable by the slogan that they contained "less meat and more patriotism." The production of America's beloved ice cream was reduced in favor of butter and dried milk. It was disclosed that the fishing catch of 1942 had sharply declined in comparison to the already reduced catch of 1941. This would affect the civilian population all the more as 60 per cent of the canned-fish production had been reserved for the armed forces. On March 29, butter, cooking fats and oils, oleomargarine, lard, salad oil, cheese, meat, and canned fish were rationed. In com-

parison to 1941, meat allotments to the markets were cut at first by 35 per cent for beef and veal, 30 per cent for lamb and mutton, and 25 per cent for pork; but, according to subsequent reports, actual deliveries were much smaller, so that many people, especially in the large cities, were unable to obtain even their rations. Butchers were offering horse, rabbit, beaver, squirrel, porcupine, whale, and alligator meat, and even rattlesnakes had to contribute their lives to the war effort. Lest they make the filmgoers' mouths water, Hollywood producers have been asked not to show the galloping cattle herds that used to add excitement to the Wild West thrillers of the good old days.

#### Reduction of Food Supplies in 1943 as Compared to 1942

(Compiled by *The Nation*, May 1, 1943)

	Percentage of reduction
Fish .....	23
Fresh Milk.....	9
Butter .....	21
Cheese .....	25
Canned Milk and Milk Powder ..	18
Ice Cream.....	35
Canned Fruit .....	48
Fruit Juice .....	24
Vegetables.....	35
Rice .....	21
Sugar .....	22
Coffee .....	29
Cocoa .....	18
Tea .....	60

The Department of Agriculture has calculated the wheat harvest for 1943 as 14 per cent lower than in 1942, largely owing to the floods in the Mississippi valley. Of the reduced supplies of food, the percentage going to the general public is steadily being lowered. According to the Lend-Lease administration, only 70 per cent of the food production will be available for civilian consumption, while 13 per cent is going to the armed forces, 10 per cent to Lend-Lease recipients, and 2 per cent will be reserved for "special needs." The situation is further worsened by the existence of black markets which, despite the threatened penalties, will absorb a large percentage of these reduced supplies.

#### SHORTER SHIRT TAILS

In the field of manufactured goods, Mr. and Mrs. America are also facing a reduction of articles for sale. At the outbreak of the war, retailers, wholesalers, and factories were still well stocked to carry the public over a certain period. Meanwhile, how-

ever, people are beginning to feel the pinch. Shirt tails have been cut, ladies' underwear standardized, and the making of extra long nightgowns and fancy pajamas prohibited. Women find dresses restricted to certain standard patterns, while men are limited to single-breasted suits. Shoes are of poorer quality, as the best leather is reserved for the armed forces, and they are rationed. Wooden soles are already being used.

The manufacture of refrigerators, reading lamps, sewing machines, phonographs, radio sets, cameras, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, musical instruments, etc., has been banned, and some of them may be sold from stock only against special license issued by the authorities.

#### Estimated Reduction of Manufacture in 1943 as Compared to 1942

	Percentage of Reduction
Kitchen Utensils .....	90
Electric Appliances.....	98
Electric Bulbs .....	25
Radio Tubes.....	72
Furniture .....	25
Stoves .....	65
Water Boilers and Heaters ....	55
Electric Radiators .....	90

Especially hard hit is the fair sex that used to indulge in a sophisticated change of personality by choosing from a large variety of hues and scents to capture the fancy of unsuspecting males. Face powders, lipsticks, nail polishes, perfumes, creams and other beauty preparations have been cut down considerably in number and quantity. Men are just as badly off as regards drinks. Of a total of 123 distilleries producing alcohol for the manufacture of whisky and other alcoholic beverages, only 18 may continue in business. The remainder has had to adjust production to war needs. No wonder that the Governor of Ohio, under the slogan of "Whisky only for Ohioans," has bought up 38,000 barrels of Kentucky whisky in order to forestall a shortage in the future, this whisky being sold only to inhabitants of the state against official license. Since May 1942 newspapers have grown smaller in volume and size. They are restricted to two editions daily, instead of the former eight or nine.

#### AMERICA MUST LEARN TO WALK

But it is in the field of transportation that the war has most thoroughly revolutionized American life. Before the war, 29 million private cars, taxis, and lorries—more than those owned by the rest of the

world together—sped over the far-flung network of America's highways. Rubber was easily available from East Asia, and gasoline supplies seemed inexhaustible. But times have changed. East Asia's rubber is remaining in East Asia. Hence the USA is forced to preserve rubber stocks and even collect used rubber goods and tires for regeneration.

In May 1942 gasoline rationing began in 17 eastern states and was later extended to other states. Up to April of this year, 17,000 tank stations had been closed down, and another 20,000 are expected to follow suit before the year is out. The purchase of new cars has been made subject to a special permit, which is only issued if the absolute necessity for the use of a car is proved. The decrease in motor traffic is more than just a personal inconvenience. The economic system of the country, the going to and from work, for example, was based on it. In a city of the western states which is more or less typical of the whole country, 80 per cent of the workers traveled to their jobs in private cars.

You are mistaken if you think that Mr. and Mrs. America might just turn to the good old bicycle as we have done in Shanghai. Even these are reserved for people occupied with war-important work. Travel by rail has likewise been curtailed, and the 300 private air lines have been put under army control.

The standard of living has also deteriorated in the way of personal services. Laundries have reduced operations on account of the labor and fuel shortage. Last winter many apartment houses and offices were insufficiently heated as a result of a lack of coal and oil, and the chances are that conditions in the coming winter will be worse.

#### PRICES AND TAXES UP

Prices are steadily rising. The news reports on the cost of living in USA are contradictory. This is not surprising, as the methods of calculation differ. According to a statement by Miss Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, the cost of living for American workers rose by 22.8 per cent between December 8, 1941, and March 15, 1943; while an announcement of the Department of Commerce put the increase in the cost of living at 25.5 per cent up to the end of 1942. If black-market prices are taken into account as well as official ones, the increase is considerably higher. It must also be considered that the price level began to go

up long before the USA joined in the war. The wholesale price index since August 1939 had risen by 32 per cent up to September 1942 and by 40 per cent up to the end of that year. The latter two figures are all the more interesting as they show an accelerated upward trend despite the Anti-Inflation Act which came into force on October 12, 1942.

On the other hand, taxation is an increasing burden on the people, especially on those in the lower income brackets. The reduction of the taxable income to \$12.00 weekly has hit 16 million wage earners who had previously been exempted from income-tax payments and who, in contrast to the big corporations, have no chance to circumvent them. Since January 1943, the so-called "victory tax" of 5 per cent has been imposed on some 44 million taxpayers, with an extra 10 per cent being deducted as a compulsory subscription to the war loan. Five months later, taxes were raised again, 20 per cent of salaries and wages being retained by employers for transfer to federal revenue offices. There is talk of further tax increases. Indirect taxes have also mounted.

#### END OF INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENCE

The Administration struck at the very roots of the American standard of living when it froze wages and decreed that no worker might change his job without special permit. Workers and employees engaged in plants manufacturing for civilian consumption, however, have been compelled to give up good positions and either to accept jobs in the war industries or to join the armed forces. Moreover, the 40-hour week has been abolished and the 48-hour week introduced in many districts.

Many small traders and manufacturers have been forced to give up their business altogether and exchange their independence for employment in war-important enterprises, or at least to reduce their activities for lack of labor or supplies. The Administration has given preference to the large corporations in placing war orders. Early in 1942 it was calculated that no less than 90 per cent of all armament orders had gone to 56 concerns.

The large demand for labor has, of course, brought many people out of the ranks of the unemployed back to work and pay. While the former beneficiaries of the American standard of living have suffered, many of the down-and-outs have risen above starvation level, one of the few bright spots

in an otherwise dark picture. Moreover, an increasing number of women are engaged in war work; the same is true of youths, who are earning easy spending money.

#### THE RETURN OF AL CAPONE

The sharp increase in female labor is bound to have grave consequences on the morals of the nation and thereby on the American way of life in general. Children are neglected by their parents and left to their own devices. Minors have taken to murder, robbery, and burglary; girls in their teens have turned prostitutes. FBI statistics reveal, for instance, a 55-per-cent increase in delinquencies of minor girls during 1942 as compared with the preceding year, and during the current year a further rise has been noted. The facility with which youths can make money nowadays will exert a demoralizing influence and will make it difficult for them to adjust themselves to normal conditions once the war is over.

Add to this the growing crime wave amongst adults. Gangsterism has been re-suscitated on a big scale. The black markets are flourishing. Criminals and bootleggers engaged in this trade are just as ruthless and brutal as they were in the heyday of prohibition. One well-known gang bought up no fewer than nine canneries, the production of which went mostly to the black markets.

Al Capone is back in business, too. He has his men buy up factories and shops and has organized a huge black-market trust. In New Jersey and New York alone he is said to have sold more than 5,000 tons of meat in one month at a "very satisfactory" price. Early this year Chicago housewives spent approximately one million dollars every week on the black market. At Pittsburgh it was estimated that 3 out of every 10 pounds of meat originated from clandestine abattoirs. An investigation of 500 tank stations on the East Coast showed that 70 per cent ignored the price regulations. Ration tickets are stolen and sold at high prices. *Time* cites the example of the Northrop Aircraft Factory, which takes recourse to the black market in order to obtain meat for the workers' canteen. 75,000 employees of the Douglas Aircraft Works receive their daily meals in the plant from black-market supplies. Hoarding is done on a gigantic scale. As Senator Byrd recently wrote in the *American Magazine*: It is enough for a druggist to say that razor blades will be rationed, and crowds will start storming the shops to hoard razor blades.



## THE REASONS

What are the reasons for the general decline in the standard of living, which must have shocked many Americans? Although the USA had for some years been preparing for war, the sudden entry into it disorganized the country's economy. About 10 million men were drafted for military service. Millions of others flocked to the basic and armament industries. 3 million farmers and farm hands alone, or about one quarter of agricultural labor, left the fields. The internment and mass transfer of Japanese nationals contributed to the labor shortage on the West Coast.

Furthermore, the tremendous demands for raw materials on the part of the armament industry, and the strain on the transportation system, made it necessary to lower civilian consumption. Motor trucks are growing scarce owing to the rubber and oil difficulties. Hence the railroads have been overburdened, little being done for replacement of wear and tear in the rolling stock. Merchant ships are being put to military tasks and frequently sunk.

The fact that many who have long been unemployed have found work and are thus able to buy more than while they were on relief also means that the number of actual consumers has grown, and the shrinking supplies have to be divided among more people.

Then there is the appalling inefficiency of a top-heavy bureaucracy, which has permitted production and especially distribution to run into a muddle of gigantic proportions. In the August issue of the *Reader's Digest*, Louis Bromfield quoted one leading personality in the US food industry as having said that, if Dr. Goebbels had been sent to the USA on a special mission to upset the food production of the country, he could not possibly have done a better job than the present Washington authorities.

The fixing of price ceilings for agricultural products has induced farmers either to evade them by selling on the black markets or to neglect fields and gardens for better-paying work. Fertilizers have run short, and bad weather and floods early this year have also affected the yield. The black markets and the belated rationing of commodities have led to hoarding on the part of those with higher incomes, which was facilitated by official announcements as to what goods would be rationed next. Pro-

duction has also been reduced by strikes and slowdowns which, even if directed against war industries, will always hit the civilians in the end.

## THE EFFECT

All this is unlikely to keep the fire of enthusiasm burning which may have swept the country at the outbreak of war. The nation whose administration has pursued an aggressive policy, ostensibly for the preservation of the American way of life—with the accent on its pleasant and agreeable material side—is in for a great disillusionment. Even those who have found work and pay after years of penury will have little pleasure in earning money without being able to buy the things they have missed for many years, except on black markets at excessive prices, while the cost of living and taxes are going up. Certainly they do not like to see their wages fixed when prices for daily necessities are rising. They will feel annoyed at not even being able to obtain the rations to which they are entitled, while others can get everything they want because they can afford it. Americans would probably not mind a rationing system if it were carried out with a sense of social justice; but inequalities such as they are found in the USA cannot but weaken the morale of the people.

The amount of money spent by the Administration on the war has increased the nominal income of the nation tremendously. Even after deducting taxes and war loans, in 1943 every American had \$4.00 to spend for every \$3.00 which he had two years ago, i.e., an increase of 33½ per cent. Even though much of this is absorbed by rising prices, the mounting circulation of money, coinciding as it does with a decrease in the production for civilians, has resulted in inflation. This, in turn, is affecting the cost of war materials, which again will cause the public debt to rise more rapidly. The Administration, fearful of the wrath of public opinion, is hesitant to tell the people the naked truth, namely, that the war demands many more sacrifices in the standard of living. It is still upholding the pretence that Americans can afford to take things easier than other people, lest the Roosevelt regime be defeated in the next election.

As the American people approach the second anniversary of the war, and become aware of their declining standard of living, they must be asking themselves: Shall we ever see the American way of life again?—K. F.